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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by African Women's Development and Communication Network, Akina Mama Wa Afrika, Association of African Women for Research and Development, Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women and Women in Law and Development in Africa, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Statement of the African Women's Caucus at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Preamble

Recalling that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on States parties to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas, and that the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) also provides for the human rights of rural women, including the rights to development and food security,

Recalling also that African Heads of State declared 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade, underscoring a grass-roots approach to gender equality and women's empowerment as a means of accelerating the implementation of commitments made to women's human rights,

Highlighting that, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, women in sub-Saharan Africa, responsible for 60 to 80 per cent of food production for both consumption and sale, are the backbone of the agricultural workforce,

Acknowledging that in line with Millennium Development Goals 1, 2, 3 and 7, which aim to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, ensure universal and equal access to primary education, promote gender equality and ensure environmental sustainability, most Governments have adopted policies to achieve food security and education for all,

Noting, however, that the proportion of the population of sub-Saharan Africa living on less than $1.25 a day has increased in the last three years,

Aware that rural women's contribution to poverty reduction through agriculture, health and other economies remains concealed and unaccounted for in monitoring economic performance measurement,

Concerned that the burden of HIV/AIDS, conflicts and disasters, like drought and famine, often falls disproportionately on women, weakening their resilience in terms of consumption adjustments, asset depletion, work burden and, in extreme cases, destitution,

Further concerned that high illiteracy rates among rural women, discriminatory legislation, social and cultural obstacles and inadequate leadership and management skills hinder women's freedom of choice and mobility in the socio-economic context; and, moreover, that women's exclusion from relevant decision-making processes at the community level, and within political parties, public institutions and professional organizations, has meant that the issues of most concern to women have been neglected,

Underscoring that the persistent patriarchal social norms, gender insensitive legislation and limited political will for rural women's empowerment relegate them to high levels of discrimination and vulnerability to food insecurity, disease and violation of their human rights,

We hereby call on:

African leaders and Governments to:

- Embrace full equality of opportunity between women and men, in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, as a fundamental principle for eliminating the prevailing disparities between them
- Comply with the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa to promote and protect the human rights of rural women
- Include in reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights measures taken to advance rural women's human rights
- Review economic frameworks to quantify women's contribution and ensure gender sensitivity in all fields
- Urgently strengthen accessibility to comprehensive health care in rural areas for maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS services, and ensure protection against sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls
- Acknowledge traditional knowledge and take the lead in developing and delivering gender-sensitive agricultural education programmes, natural resource management and climate change adaptation technologies, extension services and market and trade opportunities
- Institute measures that enforce affirmative action and policies geared towards the promotion of women's participation in decision-making in agriculture, cooperatives and trade and value chains in rural areas
- Abolish the plurality of legal systems and enforce protective legislation that facilitates individual and collective women's access to physical assets, such as land, credit, occupational inputs and natural resource management
- Prioritize rural women and local communities' social security programmes with emphasis on unemployed rural women, orphans and vulnerable children, victims of disasters and other vulnerable groups

Development partners to:

- Support multilateral and bilateral trade agreements that will increase recognition of more formal jobs and improve work conditions for rural women
- Support research on rural women's development in Africa, including factors responsible for women's marginalization in economic development, to encourage policy changes based on reliable, evidence-based studies
- Support the implementation of Governments' and bilateral and financial institutions' investment policies that preserve and protect the interest of rural women and local communities and facilitate equal access to benefits sharing

Civil society organizations to:

- Monitor progress on Governments' obligations to develop gender-sensitive legislation that gives women equal access to economic opportunities
- Monitor and evaluate Governments' progress in delivering gender-sensitive allocation and expenditure on agriculture and other sectors to ensure integrated gender-responsiveness and guard against corruption
- Increase gender-sensitive research that examines factors contributing to poverty and the interrelationship between women's productive and reproductive roles
- Introduce mentorship programmes between professional women in agriculture, science and technology and rural women, for learning and advocacy
- Intensify civic education and the dissemination of laws and policies that protect and preserve human and environmental rights to rural communities and rural women and children in particular.